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A
SERMON,
PREACHED IN THE
PARISH CHURCH OF CARSHALTON,
ON THE 28th OF FEBRUARY, 1794;
BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR
A GENERAL FAST.

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PREACHED IN THE
PARISH CHURCH OF CARSHALTON,
IN THE
COUNTY OF SURRY,
ON THE 28th OF FEBRUARY, 1794;
BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR
A GENERAL FAST.

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AND OF BECKENHAM, IN KENT.

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1794.

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SERMON, &c.

JOEL ii. 15, 16, 17.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the people; sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach; that the heathen should rule

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over

over them. Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

THIS is the command of God, upon a memorable occasion. When the transgression of his people had provoked him to anger, he sent among them *the palmer worm, and the locust*, to destroy the herb of the field, and the produce of their land. The declaration of his approaching vengeance is thus recorded: *Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell ye your children of it; and let your children tell their children; and their children another generation. That, which the palmer-worm hath left, have the locusts eaten; and that, which the locust hath left, hath the canker-worm eaten; and that, which the canker-worm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten.*

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In the midst of this desolation, we find the compassion of Jehovah manifested; his judgment tempered by mercy. *Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat-offering, and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God? Then follow the words of the text—*

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the people; sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them

*say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not
thine heritage to reproach; that the heathen
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say among the people, Where is their God?*

Public humiliation, to deprecate the vengeance of God, was a custom in those early days. We have several instances of it in scripture. Two are recorded in the first lessons appointed for this day. 'We have seen Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, proclaiming a fast throughout all Judah, and gathering his people together to seek the Lord. *And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, imploring the protection of his God against those enemies, whom he was unable to withstand. Under the Jewish theocracy, the divine assistance was both plainly promised, and visibly afforded. We are told, therefore, in this memorable passage, that it should be granted. Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid, nor dismayed, by reason*

*reason of this great multitude ; for the battle is not your's, but God's**. The consequence was, the enemies of Jehoshaphat were subdued.

The other instance is, in the king of Nineveh, whose kingdom was threatened with immediate destruction. *Yet forty days, saith the prophet, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people believed God, and proclaimed a fast ; and, according to the custom of those days, put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them, even unto the least of them. The king also arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. But he did not confine his humiliation to outward acts of devotion. Humility, without repentance, and reformation, is vain, Let them, he adds, cry mightily unto God ; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way,*

* 2 Chronicles xx. 15.

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and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

We are now assembled with a similar intention—to humble ourselves before God, and to deprecate the judgment, which may threaten us. To be engaged in war, however just, however necessary, that war may be, is to suffer no small calamity. It is termed, by the most High himself, one of *his four sore judgments*. It is the result, and the punishment, of sin. It brings upon a nation the bitterest woes; banishing that peace, which is its greatest blessing; separating the dearest friends; and delivering to death many of its brightest ornaments.

* Jonah iii. 4, &c.

It is attended by the tears of some, and the lamentation of all. How many, whom the fortune of war, as we mildly term it, hurries from the world, are bewailed by the widow and the orphan? How many, when the *swords are beaten into ploughshares* again, will bewail the loss of a father, a brother, or a friend? How many are there, from whose fortune, and from whose memory, the deep impression will never be defaced? How few are there, who do not suffer from it in some degree? Well then may we pray for it to be happily terminated.

Such is our situation at present, and such the miseries that attend and threaten us. In such a situation, to whom can we flee for refuge, but unto God? He hath the issues of life. *He woundeth, and healeth; he killeth, and maketh alive.* It is he, *who maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth; who breaketh the bow, and cutteth*
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the spear asunder. May he deliver us from the calamity, which now involves us; and restore that peace, which once prevailed! Whatever may be our political opinions, in this we all shall join: and this is all that politics have to do in this place. *This is none other than the house of God;* from whence all human policy should be banished; where no worldly principles should intrude. Yet, even here, our circumstances should be seriously weighed, that they may lead us to the object of this day's humiliation: but for no other purpose. In this light we shall consider them.

We are engaged in a contest, unlike every other in which we have been engaged, both from the object we contend for, the apparent means of concluding it, and the seeming impossibility, under the present circumstances, to abandon it. How distressing must be the situation of that country, which hath embarked in a war, that

that can neither be prosecuted, nor abandoned, without equal danger ! This seems precisely our's—a situation, which should lead us unto God for safety ; whilst we seriously consider what are the most probable means of deliverance. Some duties also we are called upon to practise. We should submit to the government, under which we enjoy such invaluable blessings ; we should act with unanimity ; and humble ourselves before God. We should suppress that restless spirit, which was certainly gaining ground not long ago ; and has brought on those dreadful calamities, that are now desolating a neighbouring land. We should be contented with the situation, in which Providence hath placed us ; and be thankful for the blessings we enjoy : because gratitude for them is the most probable way to secure and increase them. And shall we not be humbled before God for our manifold offences ? For personal transgressions, personal forgiveness should

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be implored; for those, which are committed by us as a nation, humiliation that is national is also requisite.—For the exercise of it, this day is appointed: and every serious person must allow that it is highly needful. In this act of devotion there should be no exception; all should join in it.

When the Most High gave the command in the text, all were to obey it, because all were inhabitants of a guilty land. Even the tender infant was not excepted; and the joy of all was to be turned into mourning. *Gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the temple and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach; that the heathen should rule over them. Wherefore should they say among the people,*

people, *Where is their God?* Let us follow this command; and, with the deepest humiliation, not merely with the semblance of it, let us approach the God we profess to intreat for mercy, through the mediation of our Lord and Saviour. If, as a nation, we unfeignedly humble ourselves before him, and sincerely implore the pardon of our sins, and that heavenly aid we profess to solicit, we may hope to expect it: but if we make it only a matter of form and ceremony, merely a day of abstinence from food, no benefit can arise from it. *Is it such a fast that I have chosen?* saith the Lord; *a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head like a bulrush? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day unto the Lord?* Let us remember, that in this, and every other act of religion, if it be only the appearance of what we profess, *it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.* An acknowledgment of our sins, attended by an unfeigned repentance and reformation,

tion, distinguish the fast which God ordains. The apostle's rule, with the application of it to a different day, should regulate our practice on this occasion. *Let us keep it, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Long has this favoured isle, the envy of surrounding nations, enjoyed the choicest blessings of heaven. Conquest hath usually attended our arms, and commerce poured her riches into our ports. Plenty hath been diffused through our land; the sacred oracles are committed to our care; and liberty, both civil and religious, is our birth-right. Would to God these blessings had met with the return they merit; and inspired us with the gratitude they demand! Then would our character, as a nation, be unrivalled. But alas! dissipation and luxury have resulted from our
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conquests and our commerce; and the scriptures are disregarded: while our boasted liberty has been prostituted to licentiousness; and we are “pulling down the vine to get drunk with the grape.”

However painful these reflexions may be, they are too just: for, with the strongest prejudices in our own favor, we must confess that our iniquities are many, and that our nation is characterised by almost every vice. Among a great number that might be specified, we must lament a general profanation of the sabbath, and the neglect of public worship; especially among those, who ought, from their elevated stations, to set a better example. Shall we not reflect upon these offences, and bewail them?

Though all events depend upon the providence of God, still there have been certain causes, which have usually been

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followed by certain effects : so that sin hath generally brought on its punishment, even in this world. Sacred history informs us what was the state of the Jews, when God punished them by the heathen nations : and both sacred and profane history teach us what was the state of each empire, when subverted by another. Similar causes produce similar events. The divine counsels are generally executed in what we call *the natural course of things*. When a nation is distinguished by irreligion and contempt of things sacred ; by licentiousness, faction, luxury, and extravagance ; we naturally conclude, that, without essential reformation, the conquest of that nation is becoming more and more feasible every day ; because the same vices, which provoke the divine vengeance, prepare the way for its execution. Such were the characteristics of the ancient people of God in the times preceding their several captivities. Such was the case when the old Assyrian empire perished

perished with Sardanapalus ; when Babylon was surpris'd by Cyrus ; when Greece fell under the dominion of the Romans ; when these last were overwhelmed by the northern nations ; and when Constantinople was taken by the Turks. *—Though I trust, the arm that has hitherto protected, will not be lifted up to destroy, our nation ; yet we should consider how far its characteristic vices are like those of the ancient empires, when they verged to decay, or fell by the hand of the conqueror.

There is one remark, which some may be ready to make—that, in the present contest, the nation we are contending with, is more plainly marked by irreligion than our own :—

It is a sad reflexion, that we are only less wicked than our enemies ; and that our

* See a Sermon of Bp. Horne's on the Rise and Fall of Empires.

hope arises from not having utterly rejected the Almighty. In this I trust we are less criminal; and that *the measure of our iniquities* is not yet full. God grant it never may! and that a sense of them may lead us to repentance.

Without any breach of charity, or that national prejudice, which too often leads us into error, may we not address the Almighty in the language in which he once commanded his servants to address him? *Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them. Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Are not their battles fought without professing to believe there is a God, who can give victory to their arms, or withhold it? Are not their decrees passed in defiance of his authority? nay in avowed ridicule of it? Are not many of their questions discussed, and their resolutions formed, in contempt*

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of every thing sacred? In a word, Are not those persons the most applauded, whose impiety can, in the most daring manner, blaspheme the holy scriptures, the God who made them, and the Savior of mankind? Are not these facts, which must be acknowledged? And can we, upon the broadest principles of religion, on the bare supposition, that *there is a God which judgeth the earth*, conceive that such things can pass unnoticed? It militates against every principle, in which any of us were nurtured; against every principle, but that of atheism; and forces upon our recollection what God himself asserted of a guilty nation, *They overpass the deeds of the wicked; they judge not the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? **

* Jer. v. 28, 29.

When the haughty Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was marching against Jerusalem, to attack Hezekiah, king of Judah, he threatened to destroy him, if he did not surrender at discretion ; and contemptuously told him, not to trust for protection in his God. *Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.* Hezekiah, however, was not to be seduced from his confidence by the blasphemy of the wicked. Therefore, when he had read the letter, which Sennacherib had sent him, he *went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord, saying, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubim, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth, thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear ; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see ; and hear, all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach*

reproach the living God. What was the result? The blasphemous Assyrian was defeated; and soon after slain *in the temple of Nisroch his god*, and in the very act of worshipping him, by Adrammalech and Shazer his own sons. So, saith the prophets of old, *let all thine enemies perish, O Lord! but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.* *

In every state of danger, our only reliance is upon God. It is particularly so in the sad scenes of war, *when the battle is not always to the strong.* Though we should, in every case, use such means as are likely to accomplish the end at which we aim; yet, as the victory is his, who *saveth not with sword or spear*; with what superior confidence would our armies march, if He were our refuge: and we could say, as David did to the Philistine, *Thou comest to me with a*

* Judges v. 31.

sword, and with a spear,—that is, trusting only to human efforts—but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God whom thou hast defied? This event, we must confess, was visibly marked by divine interposition; yet the confidence, which David shewed, was the confidence that should always exist.

There is a memorable circumstance, recorded in scripture, to shew that no man is saved by the *multitude of an host*: and though nothing but folly and presumption could lead us to expect the repetition of such a miracle; still it confirms the *principle* that has been laid down. When Gideon led his army against the Midianites, *the Lord said unto him, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying,*
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*Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return, and depart early from mount Gilead: and there returned of the people twenty and two thousand, and there remained ten thousand. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many: bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there; and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee: and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. The result was, that Gideon's army was reduced to three hundred; with which he overthrew the Midianites; for as soon as the Israelites blew the trumpets which they carried, the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even through all the host; and the Midianites fled before them. **

Though it would be madness for us, as we have already observed, to expect such

* Judges vii. 1—22.

culous interposition; still it establishes the assertion in its general application, that *there is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many, or by few* *; while it teacheth us to rely on Him, who can produce the happiest event, when the circumstances that precede it may seem unpropitious. He once, as history informs us, so visibly interposed in behalf of this country, that our army, with its sovereign at its head, sung that triumphant song of praise, introduced by this grateful acknowledgement, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the glory, for thy mercy, and thy truth's sake.* And He who then led us to victory, may again make us triumph over the same nation. Our cause is at least as just. We then fought for glory. We now fight for religion and for safety.

The way to obtain the blessing of God, is, to seek it; to confess his power, and to

* 1 Samuel xiv. 6.

rely upon it; to humble ourselves before him; and to add repentance and reformation to our humility.—Were this the general practice of the nation, we might expect success; for *them that honor me, saith the Lord, I will honor; but they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.*—Since this is his solemn declaration, let us seriously attend to it. We cannot, it is true, produce a national reform; but each of us may reform an individual. Let us be careful that we do not add to the sins of the nation: then, though the torrent may still rush on, we shall not increase it. Our example will neither add to the mass of corruption, nor be an injury to others. Each of us hath a character to support, which no crime should blemish, whether of a public or a private nature. There is no such thing, indeed, as private injury; because the happiness of society arises from the good conduct of the individuals who compose it.

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There is another thing worthy our serious consideration—We have an eternal, as well as a temporal, interest to secure; an interest, unconnected with national concerns, and infinitely superior to them; that will exist when the nations of the world shall have an end, and the earth itself shall be destroyed. This should awaken our attention, and lead us to sue for mercy; that when *the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ*, we may be found among his faithful subjects; among those, who have served Him in this world; and whom He then shall honor with his presence, and bless with his salvation. Then will the prosperity and adversity of other kingdoms be forgotten: while the very anticipation of it will make us careful in the discharge of our duty; will lessen the anxiety that would otherwise distress us; and take from adversity its keenest edge. His servants are always safe, always happy. Through
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the changes of this life, He is their refuge. He will *never leave them, nor forsake them*: and though but a few may be found, *as the gleaning grapes, when the vintage is done*, yet He will protect them, saying, *Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm*. No troubles can materially hurt, nor even death annihilate their hope. Death, indeed, will put them in possession of what they hope for. This is the consolation, I trust, of many thousands, whom the oppression and the blasphemy of the French have driven from their native land. With all the error and superstition, which their religion may contain, still if they have built, as the apostle phrases it, upon the true *foundation*, the *gold*, the *silver*, and the *precious stones* will remain; though the *wood*, the *hay*, and the *stubble* will be burnt up*. They could have been supported under their distresses, only by the God they

* 1 Cor. iii. 11, &c.

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serve; to whose refuge they have fled for protection; and to whom they will join us in praying, *Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them. Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?*

Though the clouds may be gathering blackness, and no ray of hope appear; still, if the *Lord set his bow in the clouds**, our disquietude will end. Then will the waters of strife assuage, and the dove return with the olive branch†. May He, who alone disposes all events, accomplish this! May He check that dreadful effusion of blood, which hath attended the present war! that “unity, peace, and concord” may again prevail. As the *fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*; and to *humble ourselves under his mighty hand*, the surest way to be

* Genesis ix. 13.

† Genesis viii. 11.

*exalted in due time * ; let us fall down before
his footstool, and supplicate his mercy.
Then will the Lord be jealous for his land,
and pity his people.*

* 1 Peter v. 6.

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